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ABSTRACT

This paper profiles James Harvey Robinson, an important scholar of history and social issues. The paper presents a biographical sketch of Harvey's early life and education and discusses his teaching and scholarly work, including his co-founding (with Charles A. Beard) of the New School for Social Research (New York) in 1919, noting that Robinson championed the use of history as an instrument for change. It focuses on Robinson's writings, especially his contribution to the 1916 "The Social Studies in Secondary Education: A Six-Year Program Adapted Both to the 6-3-3 and the 8-4 Plans of Organization and Report of the Committee on Social Studies of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association." Contains 66 notes, 12 primary, and 4 secondary references. (BT)

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The Revolving Cage: The Views, Values, and Visions of James Harvey Robinson

by Paul E. Binford

> In any case, whether we bless or curse the past we are inevitably its offspring, and it makes us its own long before we realize it. It is almost all that we can have. The most frantic of us are like a squirrel in his revolving cage.
>
> James Harvey Robinson (1911)

INTRODUCTION

On 15 February 1914, Professor James Harvey Robinson wrote a rebuttal to comments made by William T. Sedgwick in the New York Times the previous month. Sedgwick, a noted biologist and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was interviewed regarding the feminist movement. Among his rambling and highly critical comments, Professor Sedgwick declared that feminists and suffragettes offered "quack remedies" and if successful this movement "would mean a degeneration and a degradation of human fiber which would turn back the hands of time a thousand years." Sedgwick argued that male physical dominance was a fact evident throughout the natural world, but over time men had developed a gentleness and an ingrained chivalry toward women. This benevolent attitude would be destroyed if women and men competed on an equal plane as the feminists desired.[1]

Robinson's reply to the Sedgwick interview paralleled the line of reasoning found in the The New History. Sedgwick's view of the proper social role of women, Robinson insisted, emanated from the Middle Ages. Robinson, dryly observed, that the famed biologist would undoubtedly reject the scientific ideas of the Middle Ages. Sedgwick would even likely be out of sympathy with that period's political and social institutions, i.e., serfdom, feudalism, and monasticism, and yet he would have readers believe that a woman's role and her relationship with the other gender, as first defined by the mediaeval church, "closely followed the immutable ordering of nature."[2]

Robinson maintained that the social conditions of the Middle Ages were vastly different "from those that prevail today that it seems most improbable that mediaeval conceptions of

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[1] George MacAdam, "Feminist Revolutionary Principle is Biological Bosh," New York Times, 18 January 1914, Part 5, 2.

[2] James Harvey Robinson, "Opinions From The Middle Ages," New York Times, 15 February 1914, Part 5, 4.

woman's place will be found . . . to suit us permanently." Biological findings shed little light upon the problems of civilization--"a unique and peculiar thing confined to [humankind]." Nature cannot buttress conservative views on social institutions. Natural traits are transmitted hereditarily. Social conceptions, e.g., marriage and "the suitable emotions and occupations of woman, are matters of civilization rather than nature." Robinson contended that it was not the physically strong

> that have commanded and controlled mankind . . . Even in a direct encounter it is more advantageous to have a well-directed revolver, a product of civilization, than a mighty fist, a product of nature.[3]

Nature tends to remain static, while civilization changes according to circumstance. The role of women is a product of civilization.[4]

Robinson's reply is an encapsulation of his view of history's purpose. He juxtaposed the past with the present thus illuminating a current social issue. First, he located his contemporary's conservative view of women in the Middle Ages. By analogy with other social and political concepts of the mediaeval period, Robinson deftly made Sedgwick's view look anachronistic. Finally, he paved the way for change by asserting that civilization could triumph over nature. In fact, Robinson's personal and professional life also reflected the change he saw, so clearly manifested in history, i.e., progress.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

James Harvey Robinson, a lineal descendent of the Pilgrims, was born in Bloomington, Illinois, June 29, 1863. He was the seventh of eight children born to James Harvey and Latracia M. Robinson. Robinson's father, a very successful banker, had migrated from Homer, New York to Bloomington two years before his son's birth. His father died when he was eleven, but

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

Robinson was left financially secure. James Harvey attended grade school, Bloomington High School and later the Normal School at Normal, Illinois. It was while at the Normal School that he developed a lifelong interest in science, in general, and biology in particular.[5]

In 1882 Robinson went to Europe and spent a year wandering France, working on his French and his flute playing. Upon his return from Europe, Robinson worked briefly as a store clerk and banker before he entered Harvard in 1884. He completed the four year course of study in three years and remained an additional year to complete his masters degree in 1888. In that same year Robinson returned to Europe studying German at Strasbourg for a semester before matriculating to the University of Freiburg where he earned his doctorate.[6] At Freiburg Robinson learned the "technique and methodology of historical research."[7] This training largely contributed to Robinson's emphasis on source material in his later teaching responsibilities and his "faculty for minute and painstaking research."[8] In 1890 he completed his dissertation entitled "The Original and Derived Features of the Constitution of the United States" which will be described later in this paper.

While on his second visit to Europe, Robinson met Simon N. Patten, professor of political economy at the University of Pennsylvania. Patten was so impressed with the young historian that he offered Robinson the position of lecturer in history at the University of Pennsylvania.

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[5] This passion for science was also shared by Robinson's younger brother who became a distinguished Harvard botanist. R. Gordon Hoxie and others, eds., A History of the Faculty of Political Science Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 221. Luther V. Hendricks, James Harvey Robinson: Teacher of History (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946), 1-3.

[6] Courses offered at the University of Freiburg during the 1889-90 academic year included "General Political Economy," "Special Political Economy," and "Sociology on the Basis of Ethnology." "Instruction in Public Law and Political Economy in German Universities," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 1 (1890): 87.

[7] Hendricks, Teacher of History, 3.

[8] Ibid.

After serving in this capacity during the 1891-92 academic year, Robinson was promoted to an associate professorship at age 29. Robinson's teaching responsibilities included undergraduate courses in the areas of the Renaissance and Reformation, the French Revolution and Napoleonic Period, and Europe since 1815. He also taught two graduate courses: "The Antecedents of the Reformation" and "The Early Years of the French Revolution."[9] During these years Robinson also served as an editor of the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. As a result of his four year tenure at the University of Pennsylvania, his editorship, and his contributions to historical discussions, Robinson attracted favorable attention in the academic world.[10]

In 1895 Professor William Dunning brought Robinson to Columbia College and Barnard College as their first professor specializing in European history.[11] Robinson taught a wide range of courses during his first eight years at Columbia:

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance,
Sixteenth Century to the Peace of Augsburg,
Political History of Europe from the Peace of Augsburg to the Peace of Westphalia,
The Period of Louis XIVand the Antecedents of the French Revolution,
Europe and the French Revolution,
Europe and Napoleon,
The sources of Medieval and Modern Continental History,
Seminar in Modern European History,
Medieval Institutions and Culture[12]

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[9] Ibid., 4 & 6.

[10] "James H. Robinson, Historian, is Dead," New York Times, 17 February 1936, 17.

[11] In 1896, the year following Robinson's appointment the Department of History was created at Columbia College. R. Gordon Hoxie and others, eds., A History of the Faculty of Political Science Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 61 & 221.

[12] Prior to Robinson's arrival only two courses in European history were offered at Columbia College--a European political history course from the fall of Rome to the revolutions of 1848 and a course in European political theory. Hoxie, Columbia University, 221; Hendricks, Teacher of History, 13 & 14.

In addition to his teaching responsibilities Robinson served as a member of the subcommittee on the History, Civil Government and Political Economy of the Committee on Secondary School Studies in 1892. He later served on the Committee of Five. In 1903 Robinson published a highly successful textbook on European history entitled, Introduction to the History of Western Europe which influenced "hundreds of thousands of students and teachers of history."[13]

In the 1900-01 academic year, Robinson taught a course entitled, "Development of European Culture during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The Reformation." By 1904 this course title had evolved into the "Intellectual History of Western Europe." This course in intellectual history became Robinson's most famous offering at Columbia. By 1909 the boundaries of the course had expanded to include thought from the Greek Sophists to the French philosophers. By the 1914-15 academic year the course was split into three sections and a companion course was offered on the graduate level. From 1916 until his resignation in 1919, Robinson taught only these two courses in intellectual history.[14]

Robinson's "sheer intellectual ability" made him a popular teacher and speaker. He was not a fluid lecturer--his quiet and hesitant speech suggested that he was giving "the final test to what he was about to say before its utterance." He did however have an "unusual gift of interpretation," and he was a "challenging inquirer."[15] His bold, critical, skeptical, and irreverent spirit was infused in his interpretation of historical events. J. Salwyn Schapiro, a former student of Robinson's, made these observations: "[Robinson] would diagnose a movement, an institution, a personality in a manner that was often disconcerting but always illuminating. One left his

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[13] In 1926 Robinson revised and published this textbook under the title, The Ordeal of Civilization. New York Times, 17 February 1936, 17.

[14] Hendricks, Teacher of History, 15.

[15] "James Harvey Robinson," New York Times, 17 February 1936, 16; J. Salwyn Schapiro, "James Harvey Robinson (1863-1936)," Journal of Social Philosophy 1 (April 1936): 278.

classroom sometimes puzzled but never confused."[16] In the early days of the American Historical Association the lobbies would be emptied by the exclamation "Robinson's up!" During his final year at Columbia, Robinson's "Intellectual History" course was so popular it was moved to a chemistry laboratory to accommodate student demand.[17]

Dr. Robinson resigned from Columbia in May of 1919 and joined his former colleague--Charles A. Beard--in establishing the New School for Social Research.[18] This school of higher learning was to operate without the traditional requirements, degrees, and administrative structure. The school was to be run democratically by the faculty with an executive committee chaired by Robinson. Soon the New School was facing both a financial crisis and internal dissent over the efficaciousness of its democratic administration. The executive committee's decision to reorganize combined with Robinson's increasing interest in writing for the general public led to his resignation in 1921.[19]

In 1929 Robinson received the highest honor that could be given by his fellow-historians when he was elected president of the American Historical Association. Following his acceptance address, some of his former students honored him with a volume of essays, that they had written, beginning with a piece on "Toleration." He was also recognized as a fellow of the American

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[16] J. Salwyn Schapiro, "Robinson (1863-1936)," 280.

[17] New York Times, 17 February 1936, p. 16; Hendricks, Teacher of History, 18.

[18] Robinson's biographer, Luther V. Hendricks, insisted that Robinson's "primary reason for resigning from Columbia was to enable him to give his full attention to establishing . . . the New School" which had opened in February of 1919. However, both Robinson's obituary and a letter to the editor attribute Robinson's resignation to an academic freedom controversy which first arose in 1917. That year professors James McKeen Cattell and Henry Wadsworth Longellow Dane were dismissed for their activity on the People's Council and their opposition to the Great War. This culminated in a wave of protest and the resignation of Charles A. Beard--professor of political science. Dr. Robinson resigned from Columbia faculty in 1919, his obituary stated, after a controversy during which the Columbia trustees had been criticized as "opposed to freedom of expression." Hendricks, Teacher of History, 24; New York Times, 17 February 1936, 17; Benjamin Ginzburg, "James Harvey Robinson," New York Times, 28 February 1936, 20.

[19] Hendricks, Teacher of History, 23-25.

Academy of Arts and Sciences as well as of the Royal Historical Society. He also received numerous honorary degrees.[20]

Robinson died suddenly, at the age of 72, of a heart attack at his home on February 16, 1936. His body was cremated. An editorial on Robinson, the day after his death, closed with a sentence that serves as a fitting epitaph: "He [Robinson] would not have mankind enslaved by its past; rather would he bring the past to man's liberation."[21]

TRADITIONAL TO PROGRESSIVE HISTORIAN

Robinson's intellectual transformation prior to the 1916 Report is seen through his writings. He evolved from a traditional historian, as exemplified by his dissertation, who was trained to establish facts through the methodical research of the German School, to a progressive historian of The New History, who championed the use of history as an instrument for change. Even though his dissertation reflected a traditional approach to history, its powerful analysis of the United States Constitution's origin suggests a person of formidable intellect.

Robinson's dissertation establishes a clear benchmark in his early scholarly reflections, and it reveals how far his thinking would progress over the next twenty-five years. In his dissertation Robinson asserted that the Constitution's features were derived mainly from the self-governing experiences of the various colonies/states. Robinson's analysis focused on the first three articles of the Constitution--the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. While making references to ancient democracies and democratic practices in England and the rest of Europe, Robinson held that the governmental organization and mechanisms of the colonies, later states, were the major influence that shaped the features of the Constitution.

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[20] New York Times, 17 February 1936, 16; New York Times, 17 February 1936, 17.
[21] New York Times, 17 February 1936, 16.

Robinson's analysis of the Constitution's bicameral legislature is illustrative. He noted that the "natural inference" is that the American Congress was modeled after the English Parliament with its House of Commons and House of Lords. He then wrote:

> Was the choice of the Convention then attributable to their admiration of the English Parliament? Not solely, certainly. There were, in 1787, no less than eleven practically independent communities within 500 miles of Philadelphia, which had accepted the bi-cameral system of legislating. It had been known on this side of the Atlantic for more than a century, and was a simple and natural development of the colonial governments.[22]

He also alluded to the "negative influence" of the unicameral legislature as found in the existing government under the Articles of Confederation. Robinson followed a similar analysis throughout the three major branches of government, e.g., the length of term of members of the House of Representatives, a single person executive, as opposed to a plural executive, and judicial review.

Robinson's thought is unwavering in its political orientation. A few allusions were made to social factors that certainly influenced the composition of the Constitution and were fertile soil for analysis. In acknowledging the dissension that plagued the Constitutional Convention from the outset, Robinson referred to the "cross division due to the slaveholding interests of the South."[23] He also noted that the number of houses in the legislative branches of European nations were often linked to the social classes of those countries. These brief allusions to social influences were not excavated. Robinson's thought in this initial work of his scholarly career remained in the deeply furrowed ground of political history.

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[22] James Harvey Robinson, "The Original and Derived Features of the Constitution," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 1 (1890): 212.

[23] Ibid., 205.

Over the next quarter of a century Robinson's scholarly work frequently emphasized political events, but his writings also unearthed progressive ideas. Robinson constructed his bulwark--The New History on the foundation of:

- An expanded scope of history
- The law of continuity
- Social betterment
- Textbook revision

As the concept of progress emerged as a dominant theme in Robinson's writings, his definition of 'history' also evolved into a more inclusive term:

> (1898) practically everything that mankind has ever done or thought or hoped.[24]
>
> (1900) every trace and vestige of everything that man has done or thought since first he appeared on the earth.[25]
>
> (1911) all that we know of the past of mankind, regardless of the nature of our sources of information.[26]

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[24] James Harvey Robinson, "Teaching of History in the Secondary Schools," Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools in the Middle States and Maryland (1898): 9.

[25] The New History is in fact a collection of essays that had, with one exception, been printed before as addresses or journal articles. The definition cited above comes from the first article in that collection entitled, "The New History" which, Robinson tells us, first appeared in the "now defunct" International Monthly in July 1900. James Harvey Robinson, The New History (New York: MacMillan Company, 1912, reprint, Springfield, Massachusetts: The Walden Press, 1958), 1 (page references are to reprint edition). Incidentally, The New History was not universally lauded upon its publication. In a scathing review a New York Times critique wrote:

> The title he [Robinson] has chosen suggests that he believes that he as arrived at some theory. [but] he has not succeeded in expressing his secret. The fact of the matter is, Prof. Robinson has taken a number of fugitive papers, written for many different occasions and has sought to throw them into coherent form for a book. The result is disappointing for any one who knows the high reputation of the author.

"Prof. Robinson Tells His Ideas on How History Should be Written and Historical Evidence Be Interpreted," New York Times, 28 April 1912, Part 7, 253.

[26] James Harvey Robinson, "The Relation of History To The Newer Sciences of Man," The Journal of Philosophy Psychology and Scientific Methods 8 (1911): 149.

According to his last definition, Robinson believed the past could be informed by the social sciences. In his truculent 1892 review of Sidgwick's, Elements of Politics, Robinson lamented the current scholarly state of political science which he said was currently in the "dull plodding indifference of decay," but extolled the social sciences, in general, as emerging studies with the potential for far reaching significance.[27] In fact, among historians, Robinson was in the forefront of those who welcomed the contributions of these "newer sciences of man" that changed the historical landscape by offering new insights, changing the meaning of terms, altering long-standing historical conclusions and explaining phenomena that before had been indecipherable.[28] Robinson insisted that:

> The bounds of all departments of human research and speculation are inherently provisional, indefinite, and fluctuating . . . Each so-called science or discipline is continually dependent on other sciences and disciplines. It draws its life from them, and to them it owes, consciously or unconsciously, a greater part of its chances of progress.[29]

While he embraced the social sciences and recognized that they could contribute to new understandings of the past and present, Robinson still placed them in a subordinate position to history.[30] He believed that the social sciences had generated a vast "historical

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[27] James Harvey Robinson, review of Elements of Politics, by Henry Sidgwick. In Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 3 (1892): 211-213.

[28] According to Robinson, the new social sciences included: anthropology, prehistoric archeology, social and animal psychology, the comparative study of religions, political economy and sociology. Robinson, "The Relation of History," 148.

[29] Ibid., 143.

[30] This apparent inconsistency in Robinson's view can be explained by the state of the "new sciences of man" at the turn of the century. The emerging social sciences had "one very basic similarity -- methodologically they were historical." The distinctions between social science and history had not yet crystallized. They were all scholars in the "science of social understanding." The greatest concern among historians, economists and political scientists was that social science be accepted as professional scholarship. The unity of the social sciences around the historical method contributed to history having preeminence. In addition to this, history had, among the social sciences, the oldest professional scholarly organization--the American Historical Association (AHA). Herbert Baxter Adams of John Hopkins built the association into an

knowledge," but historians would continue to be the "critic and guide of the social sciences whose results he must synthesize and test by the actual life of mankind as it appears in the past."[31]

Robinson's "law of continuity" was the central tenet in his "new history" and was frequently alluded to in his scholarly prose. The law of continuity was embedded in his belief in evolution. Robinson was convinced that the scientific discoveries of the mid-nineteenth century proved that "man [wa]s sprung from the lower animals" and "that man had sojourn[ed] on the earth . . . for six hundred thousand [years]."[32] By tracing humankind's ascent from its origin as lower animals--to savagery--to civilization--to modernity--the historian was led to the inescapable conclusion that the progress of humanity was "the most impressive fact that history reveal[ed], and the most vital in the light that it casts on the conduct of life."[33] Robinson's law of continuity was, therefore, his belief in the inexorable progress of humankind.[34]

One of Robinson's earliest references to the law of continuity appeared in an 1895 article on the Oath of the Tennis Court. Robinson insisted that this watershed event in the French Revolution was "the inevitable outcome of preceding conditions."[35] Robinson rejected the

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organization of national prominence. Adams, among others, sought to change the general perception of history as a romantic literature by professionalizing the discipline, i.e., history as science. By 1890 the AHA was recognized as the "appropriate authority for social science within educational circles." Oliver M. Keels, Jr., "The Collegiate Influence on the Early Social Studies Curriculum: A Reassessment of the Role of the Historian," Theory and Research in Social Education 8 (1980): 110.

[31] James Harvey Robinson, "Sacred and Profane History," Annual Report of the American Historical Association, (1899): 529; Robinson, New History, 69.

[32] Robinson, "The Relation of History," 147.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Robinson also referred to the law of continuity as "historical mindedness." James Harvey Robinson, "The Tennis Court Oath," Political Science Quarterly 10 (1895): 474.

[35] Ibid., 474; In 1903 Robinson similarly wrote that the Protestant Revolution was "the natural outcome of preceding conditions and convictions." James Harvey Robinson, "The Study of the Lutheran Revolt," American Historical Review 8 (1903): 212.

historical treatments that made the "Tennis Court oath" and events of equal drama appear "spasmodic and erratic."[36] Instead, he believed that the Tennis Court Oath belonged to "the great and irresistible current of advance." It was history's "lucid intervals" and not the climactic episodes in the which the "greater part of human progress has taken place."[37]

Perhaps, Robinson's most cogent description of the law of continuity is found in The New History where he wrote

> The doctrine of the continuity of history is based upon the observed fact that every human institution, every generally accepted idea, every important invention, is but the summation of long lines of progress, reaching back as far as we have the patience or means to follow them.[38]

Robinson contended that the recognition of the law of continuity or historical-mindedness was "the chief intellectual trait of our age."[39] He boldly asserted that progress was the "supreme value of history" and "the greatest lesson history teaches."[40]

Robinson argued that history could be used to serve the cause of progress, i.e., social betterment. Unfortunately, history had for centuries been in the grasp of conservatives where it was used to preserve existing social and political institutions. Robinson insisted that the study of the past was the radical's "weapon by right, and he should snatch it from [conservatism's] hand."[41] If wielded by a radical, history would confirm humankind's advancement and teach the "technique of progress" leading to the solution of existing social problems.[42]

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[36] Ibid., 460.
[37] Robinson, New History, 12 & 13.
[38] Ibid., 64 & 65.
[39] Robinson, New History, 27.
[40] James Harvey Robinson, "Historians Seek Facts, But Fail To Interpret Them," The New York Times, 26 November 1911, Part 5, 10.
[41] James Harvey Robinson, "The Spirit of Conservatism in the Light of History," The Journal of Philosophy Psychology and Scientific Methods 8 (1911): 262.
[42] Ibid., 261.

This was a fortuitous moment to use history for social advancement. Robinson claimed that among the intellectual community "social betterment" was becoming the "chief interest in this game of life."[43] Also, society was for the first time now consciously aware of the remarkable historic advancement of the human specie. History served society in the same way that memory served the individual--by making the present intelligible. History has the potential to expand our memory of time and place. Robinson optimistically wrote:

> Society is today engaged in a tremendous and unprecedented effort to better itself in manifold ways. Never has our knowledge of the world and of man been so great as it now is; never before has there been so much general good will and so much intelligent social activity as now prevails. The part each of us can play in forwarding . . . reform will depend upon our understanding of existing conditions . . . The present has hitherto been the willing victim of the past; the time has now come when it should turn on the past and exploit it in the interests of advance.

In contrast with his own more expansive view of history, Robinson found the standard fare in most history textbooks to be filled with "irrelevant and unedifying details" in the form of dates, rulers, places and battles. This predilection toward political history he attributed, in part, to the ease with which it could be written.[44] Robinson insisted that

> Man is more than a warrior, a subject, or a princely ruler, the State is by no means his sole interest. . . . He has through the ages, made voyages, extended commerce, founded cities, established great universities, written books, built glorious cathedrals, painted pictures, and sought out many inventions. The propriety of including these interests in our historical manuals is being more and more widely recognized, but political history still retains its supreme position.[45]

He held that future textbooks should have three characteristics:

1. They should "be true."
2. They should hold student "interest" and be readily understood.

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Robinson, "Historians Seek Facts," 10.

[45] Robinson, The New History, 9.

3. They should be "filled with important things."[46]

The broadened scope of history, as proffered by Robinson, created an educational dilemma--curriculum selection. He was not unaware of this difficulty, and he recognized that history, especially, required a discriminating curriculum. This selection process was of the utmost importance for the vast majority of students whose study of history was culminating at the secondary level. "We are forced to choose carefully," Robinson realized, "those things which will produce the best results in the relatively brief period assigned in the schools to each subject." It is a matter of choosing "between the better and the best."[47] He described the selection process in writing history for the general public as "picking and choosing, of selecting, reselecting, and selecting again." Events that are retained in these accounts should "illustrate some profound historical truth."[48] In lieu of a one year general history course, commonly taught in public schools at the turn of the century, Robinson similarly argued for a study of "representative epochs."[49] He urged that pupils be taught the conditions "which can alone give the events any meaning."[50] By a more intensive study of shorter historical periods, students could be introduced to the use of primary documents. The main purpose of using these original documents was "the training of the judgment and of critical powers."[51] Robinson envisioned that history instruction would accomplish far more than skill development. Attitudinally, he wanted students to learn a "healthful skepticism" and a "progressive spirit." He held that education largely determined whether a child was a conservative or a radical.

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[46] Robinson, "Teaching of History," 11.

[47] James Harvey Robinson, "Ought the Sources to be Used in Teaching History?" Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools in the Middle States and Maryland (1894): 39.

[48] Robinson, New History, 15.

[49] Robinson, "Sources Used," 44.

[50] Robinson, "Teaching of History," 11.

[51] Robinson, "Sources Used," 43.

THE 1916 REPORT

The 1916 report of the Committee on Social Studies entitled, "The Social Studies in Secondary Education," was significantly influenced by the progressive views, values, and visions of James Harvey Robinson. As the lone historian on the committee and arguably the most prominent historian of his day, Robinson's The New History was quoted, at length, no fewer than four times in the report.[52] Robinsonian notions of the law of continuity, social betterment, textbook revision, and the expanded scope of history all resonate from the 1916 Report.

Robinson's law of continuity and social betterment are consistent with the 1916 Report's definition and aims of social studies and the proposed organization and content of history courses. The committee defined social studies as:

> subject matter [that] relates directly to the organization and **development of human society** [bold mine], and to man as a member of social groups.[53]

Among the aims listed by the committee was "the will to participate effectively in the **promotion of social well-being** [bold mine]."[54] The social studies were to remain flexible and could be readily adapted to various situations. The committee could "not emphasize too strongly its belief in the desirability of such careful adjustments of courses to local and current circumstances."[55]

The 1916 Report declared that history was battling to save its place in the curriculum because it was failing the test of efficiency. The changes the report recommended in course sequence and content unquestionably reflect Robinson's handiwork. "[H]istory," the committee

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[52] Murray R. Nelson, ed. and ann., The Social Studies in Secondary Education: A Reprint of the Seminal 1916 Report with Annotations and Commentaries, (Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1994), 39, 40 & 45-47.

[53] Ibid., 9.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 13.

held, "must function in the present, namely, that history to be of educational value must ... meet the needs of present growth, in addition to explaining present-day conditions and institutions."[56] For example, seventh grade history should not be taught as though it had meaning or value itself, but it should be used to inform the present. Students are to come to recognize that the history of the United States is inextricably linked to the "history of the world."[57] The course sequence from tenth to twelfth grade featured recent history, i.e., since the seventeenth century, because it [w]as richer in suitable materials for secondary education than the more remote periods, and is worthy of more intensive study."[58] High school history courses should have a topical and/or problem based method of organization, where possible, as opposed to a strict chronological sequence. The selection of topics or problems studied should be based, in part, on its "general social significance."[59] The committee wrote:

> It is the chief business of the maker of the course of study, the textbook writer, and the teacher to do what the historian has failed to do, viz., to "hit upon those phases of the past which serve us" (the high-school pupil) "best in understanding the most vital problems of the present."[60]

The Committee on Social Studies recognized that the "lack of suitable textbooks" was one of the most serious obstacles facing its recommendations.[61] In a section entitled, "Practical difficulties of radical reorganization," the committee faulted among other things the "the lack of suitable textbooks" and the "natural conservatism" of the schools.[62] Standard history textbooks taught "a mass of facts, chronologically arranged."[63] These 1916 Report censures are

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[56] Ibid., 45.
[57] Ibid., 20.
[58] Ibid., 34.
[59] Ibid., 35.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 57.
[62] Ibid., 49.
[63] Ibid., 39.

transparently similar to Robinson's own oft repeated criticisms. In fact, Robinson would commit the latter stages of his career to writing history textbooks and popular history. More optimistically, the committee noted that some recent textbooks have begun to introduce the sociological point of view with its "threads of human progress," while subordinating "wars and political policies."

The Robinsonian principle of the expanded scope of history is evident in the 1916 Report. The committee noted that the history courses it recommended would also be "rich in their economic, sociological, and political connotations."[64] The culminating experience in social studies, for students fortunate enough to complete high school, would come with the twelfth grade course "Problems of American Democracy." In this course students would study "actual problems, or issues, or conditions, as they occur in life" from various social science perspectives.[65] The committee noted that these problems would vary from year to year and from class to class, but they should be selected on the basis of student interest and their "vital importance to society."

CONCLUSION

The principles of James Harvey Robinson transcend his own era. His influence on the 1916 Report--a seminal work in the foundation of the social studies--was profound. His intellectual evolution toward a new history embodied the progress he saw manifested in humanity. Attitudinally, he embraced both the scientific discoveries of his day and the knowledge generated by the emerging social sciences which he synthesized into his own unique view of history. By his own intellectual adaptations, Robinson buttresses our confidence in a world of rapid change and burgeoning information. Robinson also had an unwavering faith in humankind's inexorable

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[64] Ibid., 50.

[65] Ibid.

advancement. Looking at the breadth of history, both conquest and calamity, Robinson penned these prophetic words:

> man's progress was at first shockingly slow, well-nigh imperceptible for tens of thousands of years, but that it tends to increase in rapidity with an ever-accelerating tempo.[∞]

Robinson believed history was a radical weapon for change. He resurrected the past to attend to the present. History was not static or inflexible, but was to be employed in the service of current and local need. It did not serve as the basis of empty platitudes, but was to be used as society's collective memory. In this way the past made unfolding events comprehensible and existing problems solvable. In his editorial reply described earlier, Robinson adroitly wielded history against Sedgwick's chauvinistic comments in the service of progressive ends; indeed, it was history for our liberation.

∞ Robinson, "Spirit of Conservatism," 255.

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